

# Individualized Supports

## Supporting Positive Peer Interactions



### Set the stage

Plan and design activities to facilitate peer interactions - such as cooperative games or organizing children into small groups. Ensure your groups have a mix of children with strong social skills and children working to improve their skills.

### Model skills

One way to support positive peer interactions is to model different skills, such as getting a friend's attention, sharing objects, asking someone to share or joining in on a game. For children working to develop these skills, explaining or narrating what you are doing can be helpful. You can also support children with strong skills to initiate interactions with others.

Storytelling is another method to demonstrate both positive or unsuccessful peer interactions. When reading books or discussing a situation, take a moment to explain what the characters did well or what they may have had trouble with.

### Prime and Prompt

Some children may be able to 'ask Alex to play' while others may need more specific cues or advice on how to interact with peers. Prime them for a more positive interaction by giving more detailed instructions such as 'Alex likes to play with blocks too. You could ask them if they would like to help you build a castle'. You may need to facilitate these interactions with ongoing prompts and encouragement. Fade out direct supports when possible to avoid disrupting natural relationship-building.

Before starting an activity that incorporates peer interaction, you can remind all children of some positive social skills, such as taking turns talking and sharing. This can reinforce expectations while also helping children to remember important social skills. You can also prompt children to give you suggestions on how they might demonstrate these skills by asking what they could say or do.

### Interpret the 'hidden curriculum'

Some children may need help to uncover or understand behaviours or actions of other children. Program leaders can uncover the 'hidden curriculum' by explaining the rules for popular activities, abstract concepts and the pop culture references that they may be unfamiliar with. 'Slang' and abstract phrases can be particularly challenging for some children to understand.

### Acknowledge the effort

Positive reinforcement naturally occurs when peer interactions are more successful. However, even when an interaction does not go well, program leaders can praise the efforts and help the child to reflect on what they may have learned. Praise is not intended to teach the child to please others but to be proud of their own willingness to try something they might find challenging or overwhelming.

